PRIVATE MOTOR TRUCK COUNCIL OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DU CAMIONNAGE D'ENTREPRISE

50 YEARS 1977–2026

The Private Fleet Advantage

I read with interest, and to be honest, some anger, a recent opinion piece penned by longtime industry veteran, Mike McCarron. The article, entitled "The Private Fleet Creep". https://www.trucknews.com/blogs/the-private-fleet-creep-how-to-turn-private-trucking-from-threat-to-opportunity/

I have a ton of respect for Mike; however, we do not always agree, and this is definitely one of those instances. Is there valid points and truths in the article, 100%. In the article it states Private Fleets have an advantage when it comes to drivers. There are many reasons for this, with the top of the list being the pay package. The majority of Private Fleets pay their drivers by the hour. According to our own benchmarking survey, 89% of Private Fleets surveyed also offer benefit programs that include dental, medical, driver wellness and others. Over 70% offer pension plans. The average driver's work week is 54 hours, much lower than the 60 to 70 that is common in long haul segments. Although the work week is lower, the max pay rate average across all the fleets was over $108k, with drivers in their 1st year making over $70k. 74% of these drivers are home every night, with only 8% being out more than 1 night a week. The pay package as well as a work environment that also allows many drivers to have quality home time is a clear advantage many private fleets benefit from when it comes to being able to recruit and retain drivers.

Where I wholeheartedly disagree with points in the article is the view that most of the private fleets, or at least the new private fleets, had no real idea of what they were doing, and that many had limited oversight, weak compliance and mainly started the private fleet because of vanity as they loved seeing their logo going down the road. In many cases, nothing could be further from the truth. Are there bad Private Fleet Operators, of course there are. However, painting with a broad brush and putting all private fleets in the same category is unfair and inaccurate. It would be like watching only the Toronto Maple Leaf's play hockey this year, and then saying every team in the NHL is terrible as a result of how the Leaf's have performed. (die hard Leaf fan here, it is a painful existence…).

Private Fleets do take pride in seeing their logo's rolling down the highway, I could not agree more. That logo is seen by millions of pairs of eyes each and every year as it makes its way down the highway to it's end user. This is one of the best advertising campaigns, and promotions of your company you can have. It is for this very reason that most private fleets hire top notch drivers, pay them good wages, train them thoroughly and consistently, and have monitoring programs to ensure not only safety programs are followed, but also company policies, procedures and best practices. In addition to driving skills, most companies also train their drivers on customer communication, as these drivers are the companies front line, and their ambassadors.

On the other hand, if your drivers do not put their best foot forward, your best advertisement can soon turn into your worst nightmare. If truck ABC is in the ditch, no one knows what is in the trailer, and it is not associated with a brand. If a Private Fleet Truck is flopped on the side of road, cuts you off, drives aggressively, tailgates, or the driver, who in many cases will be in uniform, is rude to you, they are representing your brand. That forward-facing brand is in the public's eye, and the actions of your driver, or the condition of your truck, will have a dramatic impact on how they view your brand, and may have a large impact on whether they decide to buy your product, visit your store, or use your service. It is for this very reason that most private fleets ensure they have the best of the best, with both equipment and employees. Their very reputation and business depend on it. The way private fleets treat, respect and pay their drivers shows up in the turnover rate. Those who participated in our benchmarking survey have a turnover rate of only 13%, well below industry averages. Of that 13%, 40% of it was from either retirement or discipline, which makes the numbers even more impressive. A driver that takes pride in their job, and the equipment they are provided, is also a safer driver. This also shows up in our survey, as the overall provincial violation rate average across survey fleets was an incredible 10.6%.

These numbers clearly show that many private fleets are the best of the best! While they may take pride in seeing that logo go down the highway, the pride will quickly turn into embarrassment should the best face of that brand not be put forward. There is no better incentive than that to ensure you do things right, and most private fleets do, time and time again!

One last point I wish to make. In today's tough environment, what we need from the best of the best in the industry is to work together. The views in this article are not meant to be an us versus them. Just like in the private fleet industry, the for-hire segment has many top of class performers, who do things right, pay their drivers well, and keep safety and compliance at the top of their play book. Let's all work together to solve the issues we all face in a fragmented industry.

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